THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI OSCAR FERNANDES): (a) No, Sir.

(b) to (e) As per existing policy, NRIs are eligible to invest upto 100% in air transport services (Domestic Airlines) under the automatic route. However, Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) have not been able to avail this facility, as the guidelines of the Ministry of Civil Aviation stipulate that a scheduled/non-scheduled air transport operator's permit can be granted only to a citizen of India or to a company/body corporate provided, *inter-alia*, that substantial ownership and effective control is vested in Indian nationals. Parity of PIO card holders with NRIs in regard to investment in the Civil Aviation sector is under consideration of the Ministries concerned.

Telecom facilities in rural areas of Maharashtra

*332. SHRI VASANT CHAVAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the scheme for providing telecom facilities to rural areas in Maharashtra;

(b) the total number of villages in Maharashtra where "wireless in local loop" services have been provided, so far;

(c) the number of villages where no telecom facilities exist; and

(d) the steps taken to provide telecom facilities in those villages?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN): (a) Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) is supporting the provision of telecom facilities in rural areas of the country including the State of Maharashtra. USOF has entered into agreement with Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) and private service providers for providing following facilities in the rural area of Maharashtra:

* Provision of Village Public Telephones (VPTs) by November, 2007 in 6,441 remaining unconnected villages. This excludes villages having less than 100 population, lying in thick forest area/naxalite infested areas etc.

* Provision of Rural Community Phones (RCPs) by September,

2007 in 3,445 villages in Maharashtra service area with population of more than 2,000 and not having a PCO.

* Provision of Rural Direct Exchange Lines (RDELs) 'on demand' in 228 commercially unviable Short Distance Charging Areas (SDCAs) in the first quarter of the year 2006.

(b) As on 31.10.2005, 6,504 villages have been provided with telephone facility on Wireless in Local Loop (WLL) in the State of Maharashtra.

(c) As on 31.10.2005, out of 6,441 unconnected villages, 1918 villages have been provided VPTs and 4,523 villages remain unconnected.

(d) As per the terms and conditions of the Agreement signed between USOF and Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), the 4,523 remaining unconnected villages are targeted to be provided with VPT facility progressively by November, 2007.

National Highways in Uttar Pradesh

*333. PROF. M.M. AGARWAL: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have formulated any new road policy for development, expansion and maintenance of the various roads including National Highways in the country particularly in Uttar Pradesh;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the details of steps taken or proposed to be taken by Government to implement the above policy?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD & TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) to (c) This Ministry is essentially responsible for a development and maintenance of National Highways. The Committee on Infrastructure set up by the Government, has considered a presentation made by the Planning Commission involving programmes with an investment of Rs. 1,72,000 crore for upgradation of National Highways in next seven years (2005-2012) under National Highways Development Project (NHDP).

The Programme envisages completion of remaining length of NHDP phases I and II consisting of the Golden Quadrilateral, East-West and North-South Corridors, port connectivity and other projects, 4/6 laning of